

# The Making of Longbird: A Retrospective

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**Inverness Museum & Art Gallery, until 4 February 2012**

**WINNER of the Short Grand Prix at the Warsaw International Film Festival 2011, the Golden Dove and Audience Awards at the Leipzig Film Festival and nominated for a New Talent Award 2011 by BAFTA Scotland, Will Anderson's animated docu-fiction *The Making of Longbird* is the centrepiece of an intriguingly multi-layered exhibition.**

WILL Anderson, in collaboration with Tobias Feltus and Sophie Gackowski, has constructed artefacts and ephemera to conjure belief in the existence of a master turn-of-the-century Russian animator Vladislav Alexandravich Feltov, creating a fascinating "Retrospective" which explores artistic persona, collective memory and the nature of cinema.



Longbird

When seeing each object the viewer begins to question the narrative labelling of each piece as part of a larger authenticated fiction in the museum/gallery space. There are many layers of enquiry here; a combination of historic fiction, artistry and playful deliberation that together with the choice of techniques and presentation of objects explores our relationship to still and moving images as repositories of human memory.

Tobias Feltus and Sophie Gackowski's forged family photographs of the great Feltov utilise early photographic techniques pioneered in Scotland in the 1830's, fixing shadows of identity in a series of cyanotype prints. The use of early photographic techniques presents an interesting counterpoint to Anderson's dialogue of resurrecting the animated fragment (of a cinematic work of fiction) and "modernising" it for a contemporary audience. Use of digital techniques coupled with the deceptive simplicity of scissors and paper give Anderson's work an immediacy and creative integrity that define him stylistically.

The notion of a "masterpiece", authenticity, authorship and the artist as creator are interwoven with self consciousness and humour in Will Anderson's presentation of himself and his creation, Longbird. What shines through is Anderson's emerging talent as an artist and animator. The musician Martyn Bennett once said that in order to be pioneers we first need to acknowledge that we are heirs, and this ethos certainly resonates in Anderson's intelligent, comic and imaginative film, evoking the inherent magic of early film and photography.

The opening sequence (Anderson's creation: a fragment of Feltov's masterpiece which has presumably survived the "Great Fire") is incredibly fluid and beautifully realised, an almost kaleidoscopic vision flickering to life, marks of dust and time creating the illusion of aged celluloid. The way that Longbird picks up the edge of his own frame of reference in silhouette and curls in on himself is an apt metaphor for the explorations of the artist.



The Making of Longbird

This curiosity is a major strength in terms of Anderson's evolution as a unique creative voice. The angular morphing of imagery reminiscent of German Expressionist design and imitation of physical decay visualised in the projection itself, authenticate the film as belonging to another era. Sound also succeeds in placing the audience in another age with crackling cylinder, the audible clicking of a speeded-up projector and silent era piano accompaniment halfway between musical hall and cinema.

What follows Feltov's Longbird is part documentary; "archival" footage of Feltov at work and the documentation of Anderson's attempt to bring Longbird back to life with lively exchanges between the animated character and artist. Longbird makes his debut on "Chitter Internet Video" before being killed off by a cue from the script and a recreation of the famous fire that destroyed much of Feltov's "original" work of genius. Also screening in the gallery space is an interview between Media critic Anslie Henderson, the artist and Longbird voiced in a thick Russian accent, the animator letting his creation out of the box.

Although many of the labels on objects are infused with the joke of fiction permeating the whole gallery space there is something quite poignant about the display of film equipment and memorabilia now seemingly rendered obsolete in a digital age. An 8mm editor and viewer, an invented "Feltotrope (c.1887) evoking early moving image viewing devices from the Victorian era and the presence of architectural drawings, photographs and seating from the old La Scala Cinema in Inverness, anchor this loss in living local memory.

Screening with Anderson's "main feature" in the small gallery cinema are a series of animated films from Edinburgh College of Art graduates past and present, including Joseph Feltus's wonderfully ambiguous *Solo Duets*, Jessica Cope's *The Owl House* and the poetic simplicity of *Adore* by Michael Hughes. *Solo Duets* is particularly beguiling in its haunting use of waxen human figures and interior scenarios.

It is exciting to see these films by Scottish based animators in the IMAG gallery space and hopefully the venue will be able host further showcases of such work, bringing it to the attention of a wider public audience. It is also extremely encouraging to see Will Anderson's exploration of craft, memory and perception at the heart of *The Making of Longbird* recognised both locally and internationally.

IMAG's Winter Opening will be Thursday-Saturday until 31st March 2012.

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